

PROTECTIVE GEAR FOR NEW YORK CITY TREES

It's tough being a tree in New York City—traumatized by trash trucks, defiled by dogs, and banged up by bicycles. One on 53rd Street was so mistreated that a longtime resident on the block posted a sign: Please Do Not Trash This Tree.

Enter nonprofit Trees New York, which together with Cooper Union art school decided to go beyond signage while adding a touch of pizzazz. Their international design competition for tree guards that also function as bike racks drew more than 125 entries.

Manuel Saez's winning combination



Saez's winning "Adonis" form and function.

of full and semi-circles that ring each tree, "The Adonis," was created while he was an undergraduate in industrial design at the University of Bridgeport.

Now a master's student in Bridgeport's technology-management program, Saez says he liked the challenge of creating a design that would be

appealing and cheaply mass produced. His is made of steel.

Concern for trees was a bit of a motivator. "Every time I go to New York, I see all the bicycles—just a wheel or a bike frame—tied to a tree," he says. "And that's kind of sad. That was a good inspiration." Saez won \$3,000 for his design, which, along with the design of the runner-up, James Smith of Harvard's Graduate

School of Design, will be installed in a few boroughs over the next six months to see which works best.

The competition, which AMERICAN FORESTS helped judge, was supported by a grant from the USDA National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council (www.treelink.org/nucfac).

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James Smith; top, Manuel Saez

STREET FURNITURE

For Trees, Some Respect; For Bikes, a Berth

An urban fence may yet make good neighbors of tree huggers and bicycle riders. A competition held by Trees New York, an educational group, and Cooper Union elicited 80 designs for a combination tree guard and bike rack. The winner, top, by Manuel Saez, a graduate design student at the University of Bridgeport, looks like a half-buried steel figure eight. Any number of them can be used to surround trees of different diameters or to form a fence. Trees New York plans to sell those as well as the second-place entry, above, by James Smith, a graduate design student at Harvard, this fall; (212) 227-1887. Fifty-five entries are on display through June 14 at the School of Engineering at Cooper Union, 51 Astor Place; (212) 353-4314

SHELLY FREIERMAN



KEITH BEDFORD

VERY INTERESTING Prof. Alan Wolf of Cooper Union peers through tree on model of student's bicycle rack design. The designs, for a contest sponsored by the school and Trees New York, will be on display until June 14.

Contest seeks to save trees

Students design bike racks

By **MICHAEL SAUL**
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Victim: New York City trees.
Killer: Bicycle chains.
Mission: Protect the trees.

And, with that, an international student design competition was born.

Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, and Trees New York, a local advocacy group, invited students worldwide to design a device that would protect street trees while providing ample space for cyclists to lock their bikes.

Beginning this week, more than 50 of the students' bike rack/tree guard designs will be exhibited at Cooper Union's Albert Nerkin School of Engineering.

The top two winning designs, organizers said, will be installed this fall in roughly two dozen locations citywide.

Alan Wolf, the exhibit's curator and a physics professor at Cooper Union, said bicycle chains are lethal when wrapped around trees. But there's a way, he said, for them to co-exist.

"Trees are these nonpolluting, wonderful things. And so are bicycles," Wolf said. "The two of them can be wonderful together."

Leslie Fitzpatrick, an assistant director at Trees New York, said city trees have a much shorter life span than those in suburban and rural areas.

"A lot of people let their dogs go to the bathroom on the trees. Storeowners dump their chemicals on them," Fitzpatrick said.

The new bike racks, she said, will offer city trees a new form of protection.

"This is meeting a really great need," she said.

Tom Cocola, a spokesman for the city Department of Transportation, said the city is very interested in the new designs.

In the past several years, the city has installed more than 1,800 bike racks. Another 170 are scheduled to be installed in the next 12 months.

Combining bike racks with tree protection makes sense, Cocola said.

"It's a great idea," he said. "It's economical and environmentally prudent."

Manuel Saez, a student at the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut and the competition's winner, said he was very excited to work on the project. He named his design "Adonis."

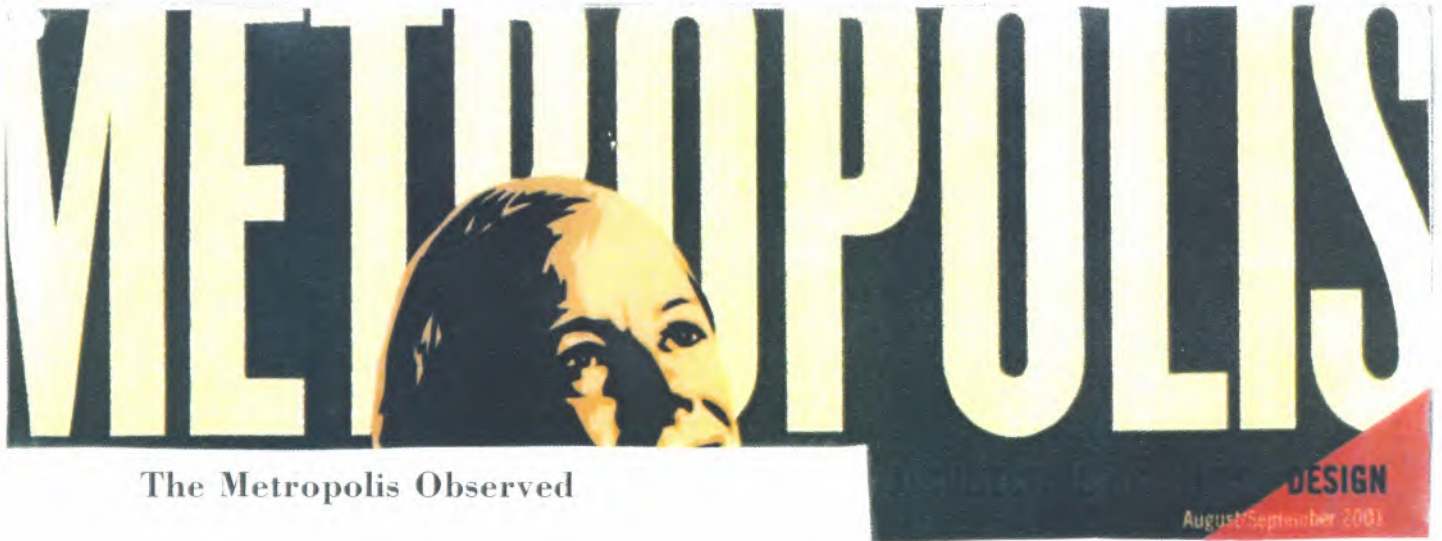
Saez, 28, said his message to urban bicyclists is plain and simple: "Take care of the trees."

The exhibit, located at 51 Astor Place in lower Manhattan, runs through June 14. It's open weekdays from noon to 7 p.m. and Saturdays, from noon to 5 p.m. An opening reception will be held today from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

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DAILY NEWS

Tuesday, May 15



Rack em Up parking

Cyclists and urban trees can live together in perfect harmony.

City trees have difficult lives. Even bicyclists, their fellow symbol of New Urbanist optimism, do them wrong, New York's citywide scarcity of bike racks has driven cyclists to secure their vehicles to tree trunks, an encounter that often ends in the tree's abrasion and subsequent death. Trees NY, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving urban life through planting, preserving, and caring for New York's trees, joined Cooper Union in sponsoring a competition for designs that could curb the problem. College students around the country were asked to design structures that could secure bicycles and discourage tree abuse simultaneously. The winning entry, by Manuel Saez from the University of Bridgeport, displays an understanding of the fabrication process overlooked by many of his peers. It consists of just two sturdy elements: a donut joined to a U-shaped base. "I realized early on that the design had to be produced cheaply, so I focused on simple shapes that would be easy to manufacture," he says. Trees NY plans to install the winning racks at selected sites in Manhattan and Queens this fall. —Rosten Woo



landscape

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architecture

riprap

• IN OTHER WORDS •

“In a world in which we are the irresponsible stewards of nature it is our own nature, rather than the wildest extremity of the natural world, that is the frontier where the civilizing has to begin.”

—SUZANNAH LESSARD, “Civilizing Sprawl,” *Architectural Record* (August 2000)

reclaiming the landscape is worthwhile.” In doing so, Berger hopes to begin a dialogue about the role of landscape architects in the reclamation process, when and how they should become involved. “We should be working at a larger legislative scale, to see what this thing really is, instead of dealing in isolated incidents,” says Berger.

The exhibit is the culmination of four summers spent studying numerous mined and reclaimed landscapes across the Western United States, presenting a body of data through images, mappings, and cartographies. The exhibit opens at the Denver Capitol Building in early 2001. For information on exhibition locations and dates go to: www.cudenver.edu/public/AandP/news/reclaim.

Problem Solving

At Cross Purposes

A STUDENT DESIGN COMPETITION ADDRESSES BIKE RACKS VS. TREES IN NYC.

“Biking is a great, environmentally friendly mode of transportation,” says Leslie Fitzpatrick of Trees New York. But there is a downside, she explains, which is that commuters and messengers in the Big Apple who need a way to secure their bicycles are using trees as bike racks.

The mortality rate is highest among young trees. When a cyclist wraps a chain around a young tree, it damages the bark, which protects the phloem cells that transport car-

bon and sugar made during photosynthesis. If a bike is chained to a young tree during the first few years after it is planted, it may die soon afterward, says Fitzpatrick. In some instances, chains have been left locked around trees once the bike is removed, causing continuous damage. Of the approximately 500,000 street trees in New York City, only about five percent are currently protected by tree pit guards or other structures, says Fitzpatrick. And some of these provide only marginal protection.

So Trees New York, in collaboration with The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, is inviting undergraduate and graduate students from all disciplines to participate in a competition to design a structure that will serve as both tree guard and bicycle rack to protect street trees in New York City. The competition is made possible in part by a grant from the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council of the U.S. Forest Service. Entries may be submitted by individuals or teams, which may be interdisciplinary.

The sponsors of the competition recommend that submissions allow for tree growth, prevent chaining of bikes to trees, discourage littering, and preserve the visibility and beauty of the tree. While entries aren't required to provide parking for bicycles, the rules allow that the structure may provide park-

ing for one or more bicycles and therefore serve the dual purpose of tree guard and bike rack.

The contest sponsors may want to reconsider one requirement, which is that the structure should not increase the level of the soil around the tree roots. The overall design of the rack and tree pit should in-

crease soil volume, improving soil conditions, says James Urban, FASLA, an expert in street tree-planting techniques. This way, entries also might help improve soil conditions.

Registration for the competition is due by January 1, 2001, and entries are due March 1, 2001. Complete details can be found at www.designnetripc.com.

The first- and second-place winners will receive \$5,000 and \$3,000, respectively. The first-place design will be manufactured and installed in a dozen locations in New York City, says Alan Wolf, a Cooper Union faculty member who is helping coordinate the competition.

Even when bike racks are available nearby, trees are still a preferred method of securing and storing bikes, according to Trees New York. This is because the trees are often closer to the street or a building's entrance than bike racks, which are typically located on the side of the building. Ultimately, the best solution to the problem may be to make so many alternatives for storage available that trees are left alone, says Urban. “The more of these [alternatives] we have out in the landscape the better,” he says.

—WILLIAM WELSH

